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New Viet Goal — 'Win Battle Of Villages'

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SAIGON

Revolutionary changes are afoot for American political strategy in South Viet Nam. That's the verdict here among United States experts, reacting to the news that Maj. Gen. Edward T. Landsdale is soon to arrive as special assistant to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.

Gen. Landsdale, a retired Air Force officer, is a favorite of counter-insurgency experts.

With him on the scene and the assurance, reportedly, of a free hand for himself and his veteran aides from the U.S., the Philippines and South Vietnam, there may be the beginning of a meaningful political policy designed to win the "Battle of the 15,000 Villages."

The villages are the heart of South Viet Nam, not its cities and towns. Until they are detached from Viet Cong ideological domination, victory can only come through massive escalation of American forces. And then it might well be a Pyrrhic victory.

CRITIQUE

Last winter Gen. Landsdale wrote in the periodical Foreign Affairs a critique of U. S. strategy in South Viet Nam which clashed sharply with the then prevailing optimism of American officialdom. He wrote:

"The harsh fact, and one which has given pause to every thoughtful American, is that, despite the use of overwhelming amounts of men, money and material, despite the quantity of well-meant American advice and despite the impressive statistics of casualties inflicted on the Viet Cong, the Communist subversive insurgents have grown steadily stronger, in numbers and in size of units, and still retain the initiative to act at their will in the very areas of Viet Nam where Vietnamese and American efforts have been most concentrated."

The reason for the Communist success in Vietnam, wrote Gen. Landsdale, is that the Communists have let loose revolutionary idea in Viet Nam and it will not die by being ignored, bombed or smothered by us. Ideas do not die in such ways."

With his arrival here, Gen. Landsdale will be presented with projects intended to bring the counter-insurgency effort to the villages and to their constituent hamlets.

PLAN

These projects are based on the forming of front organizations in rural areas to counter the existing Viet Cong "Liberation" movement which administer many of the villages in the country's 41 provinces.

The village chief, thousands of whom in recent years have been assassinated by the Viet Cong, is the key to anti-Communist organization. Where the village chief is anti-Communist, the question for him is how does he get rid of the enemies who have placed a price on his head.

He knows that no army sweeps, artillery barrages or napalm will solve the central problem of weakening the Viet Cong in his area. The job most often can only be done from within the village. Thus it will be proposed that young Vietnamese, possibly exempted from the draft, be trained in the art of countering the Viet Cong.

After an instruction period of three months they would be sent to villages as on-the-spot instructors to teach peasants and help them organize their own resistance, including para-military resistance. By this admittedly heroic effort, it is hoped that the Viet Cong political infrastructure could at least be weakened and in time uprooted.

The function of such an organization would be not only to combat the Viet Cong but, affirmatively, to uncover the specific social, economic

and political problems in the villages, for example, education. With U. S. help, village organizations might be promised the construction materials with which the villagers would be able to build a school. Teachers and textbooks would be supplied in the name of the village organization. As one American official here put it:

"Our job should be to train the people who can and will train the Vietnamese village people. We should be a sort of servo-mechanism in this effort."

If and when such a program is adopted and shows some signs of success, other counter-insurgency political steps can follow. There is, for example, the "Chien Hoi" or "open arms" policy for those village young men who might be serving in regional guerrilla forces.

It is nothing unusual, and it is frequently an open secret, for parents in a given village to remain in communication with a son serving, willingly or unwillingly, in the Viet Cong. The "Chien Hoi" program would be in the nature of a quasi-amnesty with the parents urging the "prodigal son" to return home to safety.

There are other ideas brewing among American civilian officials here, ideas which, they feel, need a Gen. Landsdale to implement them.

It is not that he is regarded as a magician, a miracle worker, so much as that he is one of the few Americans—certainly one of the very few U. S. military officials—whose counter-insurgency ideas have been successfully tested. This occurred during the Communist-led Hukbalahap insurrection in the Philippines during the early 50's when Ramon Magsaysay was president of the Republic and Gen. Landsdale his adviser.

Non-military Americans here are worried that signs of a "Korea" mentality is developing in U. S. military circles. This is defined as a mind which sees in conventional warfare the only real way to